

## **EVALUATION OF BUDGET REQUEST INDIAN STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND DROPOUT PREVENTION**

### **JUSTIFICATION**

According to Article X, section 1(1), of the Montana Constitution, every student in Montana is guaranteed equality of educational opportunity through a system of education that is designed to develop their full educational potential. This constitutional promise is not being fulfilled for a particular segment of the school population. A great number of American Indian students, as demonstrated by data over time, has consistently dropped out or underperformed in the public education system.

This proposal is necessary to close the achievement gap that exists between American Indian and white students in the Montana public education system. An example of the historic data demonstrates a very real achievement gap. American Indian students constitute 75 percent of the total 7th-8<sup>th</sup> grade dropout rate, and while American Indian students account for 10 percent of the total high school enrollment, they account for 24 percent of the total dropouts. Further, only 49 percent of Indian students score proficient or advanced on Reading portion of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) compared to 79 percent of white students. And only 48 percent of Indian students score proficient or advanced on the Math portion of the ITBS compared to 78 percent of white students. In fact, when one looks at any educational measure, American Indian students will, as a whole, under-perform. If ALL of Montana's citizens are to become a viable part of the state's economic future, there must be success in educational achievement for ALL students.

When making adjustments to the funding formula, Montana statute requires the legislature to consider, at a minimum, the needs of American Indian students. Mont. Code Ann. Sec. 20-9-309 (3) (e) (2005). The 2005 Legislature recognized the problem of historically low test scores and high dropout rates of American Indian students and appropriated \$200 per American Indian student to local districts to assist their efforts at closing this achievement gap. There was no accompanying appropriation to the OPI to address this issue at a statewide level.

In 2010, OPI is required by law to report to the governor and the legislature on the change in status of standardized test scores, graduation rates, and drop out rates of American Indian students using 2005-2006 data as a baseline. Mont. Code Ann. Sec. 20-9-330 (2005). Leading up to 2010, OPI will provide annual updates regarding American Indian achievement levels and dropout rates to the legislature and the education community. The OPI is also required to disaggregate data based on race and ethnicity for reporting Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) under the No Child Left Behind Act. Consequently, Montana will remain committed to collecting and reporting data specifically focused on American Indian students in order to be accountable to local communities, the Montana legislature, and the federal government.

The OPI must also have the ability to provide guidance and technical assistance to local districts in order to close the achievement gap and increase graduation rates, particularly since local districts were provided funding to address this crisis and the OPI was not provided funding. Comprehensive, on-going and coordinated technical assistance can only occur on a consistent statewide basis through focused efforts, and funding, at the state level.

### **GOAL(S)**

It is the mission of the Office of Public Instruction to improve teaching and learning through communication, collaboration, advocacy, and accountability to those we serve.

The five agency-wide goals of the Office of Public Instruction are:

- Goal 1: Support schools so that all students can achieve high standards
- Goal 2: Assess and communicate the quality and achievements of K-12 education
- Goal 3: Provide access to and management of information and data related to K-12 school improvement
- Goal 4: Deliver quality instruction through professional development

## Goal 5: Support accountability and improvement in all Montana schools

The Indian Student Achievement and Dropout Prevention proposal supports three of the five agency-wide goals of the Office of Public Instruction. The three goals that are targeted with this proposal are:

- ✓ Support schools so that all students can achieve high standards;
- ✓ Provide access to and management of information and data related to K-12 school improvement
- ✓ Support accountability and improvement in all Montana schools

Goal 1 of the OPI is to support schools so that all students can achieve high standards. This goal is crucial to providing an equal educational opportunity to every student. While Montana schools already provide an excellent education through the delivery of quality instruction, there is always need for improvement. The data demonstrates that the improvement necessary for the state to continue to offer a high quality education lies in increasing graduation rates and the achievement levels of economically disadvantaged and American Indian students. This achievement gap often begins early in the lives of economically disadvantaged students and early childhood programs, such as Full-Time Kindergarten, have proven to be a valuable benefit to low income students in better preparing them for school structures and academic curriculum.

Goal 3 of the OPI is to provide access to and management of information and data related to K-12 school improvement. High quality data, analysis tools, and staff resources are key to identifying gaps in our educational system and targeting resources to address the needs. A robust data system combined with a skilled research staff will help to identify which subpopulations of students, at which grade levels and in which content areas are losing ground in our current system. This research will provide the basis for the development and implementation of strategies and activities to raise achievement levels for students at risk of falling behind.

Goal 5 of the OPI is to support accountability and improvement in all Montana schools. This proposal directly ties into this goal by providing data at the state level regarding dropout rates and achievement levels as well as providing technical assistance to schools needing assistance in these areas.

### **PERFORMANCE CRITERIA**

The OPI will analyze data and report trends related to statewide assessments, dropout rates, completion and graduation rates, suspension and expulsion numbers, and special education.

To develop a fuller picture of Indian student achievement, the OPI will break down school achievement data by school demographic population (i.e. schools with 50 to 100% American Indian populations) as well as looking at schools that are on or near reservations and urban areas.

The OPI will provide focused technical assistance to schools needing support as determined by the data analysis.

The OPI will collect qualitative and quantitative data in order to develop a system that measures how well a school meets the needs of American Indian students.

The accreditation standards at ARM 10.55.803 Learner Access require local board of trustees to develop and implement processes for assessing the educational needs of its students. In developing curricula in all program areas, the board of trustees must:

- provide learning experiences matched to students' interests, readiness, and learning style;
- take into account individual and cultural diversity and differences among learners. Cultural and language differences should be viewed as valuable and enriching resources

and should take into account the unique needs of American Indian students and other minority groups;

- provide learning resources that are culturally relevant, inclusive, and current;
- provide opportunities for individual self-direction and decision making;
- provide equal access to learning resources, including technology;
- provide instructional materials that reflect authentic historical and contemporary portrayals of American Indians; and
- identify, using the school's own criteria, students who may be at risk or in need of special services.

The OPI will deliver professional development materials and activities to 1500 educators via an online system. The number of educators served will be measured by the number of renewal credits issued to educators who participate.

The needs of American Indian students include teachers teaching about American Indians in a culturally responsive manner and programs which provide students with a culturally responsive curriculum that relies on a positive disposition toward the broad spectrum of American Indian students in Montana.

### **MILESTONES**

By August 2007, the OPI will have implemented a new education data system to better identify gaps in educational achievement and to provide focused technical assistance to local schools and ensure that each student is provided a quality education that provides them an equal educational opportunity.

By December 2007, the OPI will offer an online professional development system that offers information on best practices to increase Indian student achievement. This professional development will begin with a presentation to increase awareness of the multiple issues of Indian student achievement and will move on to include an online forum where cohorts of teachers can discuss best practices, research, and instructional practices. This online forum allows an on-going and sustainable approach at the state level where teachers can earn recertification units while developing an online support system. Continued efforts to offer awareness workshops and data presentations on school sites will also be a part of the Indian Student Achievement professional development process.

During the 2007-08 academic year, the OPI will offer local districts an opportunity to take advantage of a series of research based models and services that demonstrate increased academic achievement for at-risk, economically disadvantaged, and/or American Indian students. The implementation of these pilot projects will be measured through multiple data sources to verify effectiveness and potential replication for similar contexts.

By January 2008, a statewide report on Indian student achievement will be developed and disseminated. This report will outline achievement and dropout data comparisons across demographic groups and the data demonstrating how well schools are meeting the needs of American Indian students. The report will also highlight research, best practices, and successful schools.

By August 2008, the OPI will collect data in order to develop a system that measures how well a school meets the needs of American Indian students that are tied to accreditation standards approved by the Board of Public Education. ARM 10.55.803 (see performance objectives for full standards).

By November 2008, the OPI will report and analyze trend data from its AIM on Indian student achievement and dropout rates. This data will inform the OPI on areas in need of improvement

and where focused efforts to improve academic achievement and increase the graduation rates need to occur.

### **FTE**

Two FTE accompany this proposal. One FTE will be placed into the OPI's Indian Education Division to develop best practices, conduct research, analyze data, and provide technical assistance to schools. A second FTE will be placed into the OPI's Measurement and Accountability Division to assist with the AIM and focus efforts on mining data specifically related to Indian student achievement and dropout rates. These two FTE will work closely together to best determine approaches for statewide initiatives and technical assistance to local school districts.

Once this proposal is funded, the OPI will begin its recruitment and hiring process for these two positions. The OPI will secure personnel in these positions by August 2007.

Similar to any position at the OPI, once a person becomes adept at the job, acquires specific skills that are highly sought after, and becomes established in the state's education system, they are exceedingly likely to be recruited by local school districts and other educational organizations. These other agencies often offer higher salaries, which sometimes prove difficult for OPI retention of employees.

### **FUNDING**

This proposal is for a general fund appropriation. Most of the OPI's most recent work focusing on Indian student dropouts has been completed through a federal dropout prevention grant, which ended in 2006. The OPI has Title I federal funds that focus efforts on increasing achievement levels of economically disadvantaged students, including economically disadvantaged American Indian students. However, because the data demonstrates that the majority of schools not making Adequately Yearly Progress (AYP) under No Child Left Behind (NCLB) have high populations of American Indian students, there is a need to ensure that this gap is addressed in a focused, ongoing, and sustained manner. Closing the achievement gap that exists between American Indian and white students in Montana's public schools is a state responsibility that requires a state general fund appropriation.

### **OBSTACLES**

Montana has a strong local control tradition whereby local school boards make academic decisions for their individual districts. While the OPI can offer technical assistance and support for schools to increase Indian student achievement, it cannot compel schools to engage in any practice nor can it impose sanctions for continually underperforming on statewide assessments. Funding this proposal, however, allows the state to identify achievement gaps, assist in the development and dissemination of successful strategies for at-risk students, and offer focused efforts to assist schools in their efforts.

### **RISK**

The 2005 Legislature appropriated \$200 per Indian student to local school districts to help them to close the achievement gap. However, no funding was provided to the OPI to assist schools in developing strategies and implementing practices that would help close the achievement gap. If the state does not work toward closing the achievement gap and focus its efforts and resources, including money, toward that goal, there will continue to be an identifiable group of students – American Indians -- who under-perform by every educational measure, thereby denying them an equal educational opportunity compared to white students.

The historically high dropout rates of American Indian students must be addressed. A graduate from high school has many opportunities for higher education and better skills to enter the workforce while a dropout has much more limited opportunities. Education is tied to a stronger economy. The unemployment rate on reservations is unacceptably high. A beginning point to increasing employment is ensuring that students graduate from high school having developed

their full educational potential and having been offered an equal educational opportunity as all of their non-Indian peers in Montana schools.

The risk of not funding this proposal is, of course, a continuation of low academic achievement and high dropout rates for American Indian students. The promise and hope that is provided by funding this proposal, however, is that ALL Montana students will receive an equal educational opportunity and Montana will be the recipient of a larger, more skilled workforce thereby creating a stronger economic future for Montana.